



Be Your Own Advocate



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Do you know ALL your elected officials? Many Marylanders cannot answer this. There is the old saying “all politics is local;” but many voters spend so much time focused on national elections, that they miss what is happening in their own backyards. Numerous decisions which affect you and your business are being made on a regular basis on both the state and local levels of government. That means there are copious opportunities to help your business thrive – but you must get involved!

Getting involved can seem like a daunting task. Where does one begin? For starters, get to know your elected officials. These are your representatives and they have been elected to represent you. Every January, legislators from all over Maryland descend upon Annapolis for the Maryland General Assembly’s

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90-day Legislative Session. This past Session, over 3,000 bills and a litany of budget items were considered. There were many great ideas considered (some bad ideas, too), yet it is simply impossible to pass every bill and fund every program.

Being your own advocate and having a constant presence before elected officials is essential to pushing through legislative and budgetary priorities. Involvement can happen at grassroots level or by hiring a lobbying firm to represent your interests. Grassroots lobbying can be as simple as contacting your elected officials to express support or opposition to a proposal or it can be more complex such as forming a coalition of like-minded small business owners to lobby your priorities.

Here are a few tips for how you can ensure your business interests are being represented through grassroots advocacy:

1. Identify your elected officials – www.mdelect.net
2. Contact and meet with your elected officials – get to know their issues and share your ideas
3. Utilize your local government website to obtain information on public hearings, legislation, budgetary items and small business programs
4. Sign up to receive newsletters and e-mails
5. Attend and participate in public hearings
6. Utilize the Maryland General Assembly website to obtain key legislative information - identify briefing and hearing dates, track legislation, and access a myriad of legislative and budgetary documents – www.mlis.state.md.us
7. Contact your local economic development office
8. Get involved in your local chamber of commerce

The authors, Ivan V. Lanier and Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., operate a bipartisan boutique government relations firm in Annapolis.

Advocacy

[ad-vuh-kuh-see] Noun

An activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.

